

Response to David Palm's Essay
“Pope Leo XIII On Literal Interpretation
and the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers”

by Robert Sungenis



<http://thepalmhq.blogspot.com/2010/12/leo-xiii-on-unanimous-consent-of.html>

David Palm: I mentioned [on this blog](#) that, unfortunately, there are some Catholics out and about noisily claiming that the view that the earth is the immobile center of the universe is a core part of the Catholic faith. [I have already explained elsewhere](#) why this view is untenable, but there are a few additional aspects of this issue that I want to examine over the course the next weeks.

R. Sungenis: I don't know precisely what Mr. Palm means by the metaphor “core part of the Catholic faith,” but my immediate impression is that he is trying to make geocentrism a black and white issue so that it is easier for him to have room to ignore it. It seems that if Mr. Palm can convince people that one's cosmological beliefs are not really important, then those who are teaching that there is only one Church-sanctioned cosmology are to be considered as “noisy” gongs talking about unimportant, and necessarily divisive things, and thus do the Catholic community a disservice. If that is his meaning, let me state in detail why geocentrism is important:

1) If Earth is not, as Carl Sagan says, “an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than

people,” and that “Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there I see no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves,” and instead the Earth is in the very center of the universe, well, Carl Sagan would be the first to admit that such a unique placement could not happen by chance. He and the whole scientific establishment admit that Someone would have had to put the Earth in that central place. As such, passages such as Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20; Romans 10:17-18, which speak of the cosmos declaring the glory of God and declaring the Gospel would take on a much more significant and penetrating meaning for mankind. Who could sanely deny the existence of God if Earth was the center of the universe? Think about it. When in history did man start denying God’s existence or minimizing his role? It was after the Copernican revolution fostered by Galileo, Newton and Einstein. It was the very reason that Nietzsche started the “God is dead” movement in philosophy, for in his poem, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), he writes of the Copernican revolution as the cause for our godless state:

Where has God gone?” he cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the Earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?

Paul Davies, recent winner of the Templeton prize, said much the same when his physicist colleague, George F. R. Ellis proposed a model of the universe (based on current scientific data) that put Earth was in a central position in the universe. Davies wrote: “His new theory seems quite consistent with our astronomical observations, even though it clashes with the thought that we are godless and making it on our own” (P. C. W. Davies, “Cosmic Heresy?” *Nature*, 273:336, 1978).

2) It releases us from the precarious position of having to put ourselves against the great tide of Catholic tradition that believed and taught geocentrism. For almost two millennia the Church not only taught geocentrism in a consensus of the Fathers but ably defended it against all attackers with its magisterium (Nicholas of Cusa, Copernicus, Foscarini, Galileo, Zuniga, Kepler, et al). It’s Ordinary magisterium, backed vociferously by at least a half dozen popes (Pius V, Paul V, Urban VIII, Alexander VII, Benedict XIV) and upheld by many popes before and after them, did not flinch from the geocentric teaching. But if we say that the Ordinary magisterium was wrong for almost two millennia on one of the most basic issues of biblical interpretation, then we have not only made ourselves an enemy of the traditional Church, but we have also opened ourselves up to being wrong, for if the Church of yesteryear could be wrong, then so can we. Those who decry geocentrism need to realize these deep implications. This is not merely an “unimportant cosmological” issue that we “noisily” teach; it is the backbone of what the Catholic Church is. If

the Church is at odds with its tradition and magisterial teachings, then how can it be the Church that Jesus Christ said will not have the gates of hell prevail against it?

3) It releases us from the shame of having to face a world that is looking for any excuse not to



succumb to the teachings of the Catholic Church. How many times have you heard people say, “Well, the Catholic Church got Galileo wrong, so it can be wrong on other things?” It can be wrong on whether the embryo is a human being. It can be wrong on whether homosexuality is wrong since science says it is hereditary. It can be wrong on everything from surrogate motherhood and contraception to capitalism and the role of women. In fact, a poster in England protesting the pope’s recent visit there depicted a woman in between Galileo and Copernicus with the caption “oops” under Galileo and Copernicus. The implication, of course, is that the Church erred with Galileo and it can thus err barring women from the priesthood.

4) It preserves the Catholic tradition of the literal interpretation of Scripture. Our whole Catholic hermeneutic, at least until the advent of Galileo, Newton and Einstein, has been based on taking the Scripture at face value and trying our best to interpret its words literally. This view of Scripture is precisely why we believe that a mere piece of bread can become God himself, as hard as that is for anyone, let alone Catholics, to comprehend and accept. The Church Fathers and the Ordinary magisterium took Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:26, “This is my body,” at face value and made a doctrine out of them called the Eucharist. The Church could have easily decided that these words were figurative (as many other churches do today and as Catholics often do today with passages that say the Earth is fixed and the sun moves) but she maintained her resolve that Scripture was to be interpreted literally. But after Galileo and Newton, when many believed that science had proven that the Bible’s claim that the sun revolved around the Earth was incorrect, they concluded that Scripture didn’t have to be interpreted literally any longer, and the result has been a catastrophe. Today, because of the Galileo affair, many Catholics believe the Bible is just an assortment of myths and legends, and that it can only be inerrant when it speaks on matters of salvation and nothing else. This is the very reason why the people in England could assert that the Bible’s teaching on women is in error and thus allow them to promote women priests. If the sex of the priesthood is not strictly a matter of salvation, then the Bible cannot be considered the final authority on the matter. In fact, this is precisely what Fr. Raymond Brown taught – that St. Paul’s teaching on women in 1 Corinthians was merely his misogynist opinion, which was formed by his culturally biased society.

5) It makes science subservient to the Church; not the Church subservient to science. Modern science has perpetuated the myth that it is impeccably honest with the scientific data; that its views and conclusions are always objective; that it would never intentionally deceived the public based on its philosophical or political agendas. That is indeed a myth. According to recent statistics, most scientists are atheists, and with that comes an intellectual reflex to interpret the

scientific data in a manner that promotes atheism. There is no better way to do that than to take Earth out from the center of the universe and put it in the remote recesses of space with “no help from a Creator to get it out of its mess” so says Carl Sagan.

As you can see, this issue of “geocentrism” has much more behind it than meets the eye. If it were just a matter about cosmology I’d be a fool to risk my life and reputation on such an insignificant thing. But whether the Earth is in the center of the universe or not is one of the biggest and most impactful things that has ever been discussed by mankind. Our view of where we stand in the universe hits every area of our lives, and all for the better if we accept geocentrism.

David Palm: Much is made in neo-geocentrist circles about Pope Leo XIII's dictum that the exegete of Scripture is, "not to depart from the literal and obvious sense, except only where reason makes it untenable or necessity requires" (*Providentissimus Deus* 15).

From this papal teaching, neo-geocentrists conclude that we are bound to what they claim is the "literal" interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, namely, that the sun revolves around the earth. But this claim is undermined by this admission made by a prominent neo-geocentrist writer:

the most important fact that is invariably missed by modern biblical exegetes who advocate heliocentrism is that Scripture's phenomenal language (e.g., the "sun rises" or the "sun sets") also applies to the geocentric system. In the geocentric system the sun does not "rise" or "set"; rather, it revolves around the Earth. When the geocentrist sees a beautiful sunset he does not remark: "Oh, what a beautiful revolution of the sun," just as the heliocentrist does not say: "Oh, what a beautiful rotation of the Earth." The geocentrist knows that the sun "rises" or "sets" only with respect to the Earth's horizon, and therefore, reference to a "rising sun" in Scripture is just as phenomenal in the geocentric system as it is in the heliocentric. (Galileo Was Wrong, vol 1, p. 226).

Here the neo-geocentrist seems not to realize that he has actually dismantled the geocentric appeal to Pope Leo XIII's dictum concerning the "literal and obvious sense" of Scripture. By admitting that both "geocentrists" and "heliocentrists" view these passages of Scripture as utilizing phenomenological language, he therefore admits that neither of them take these words in their "literal and obvious" sense. The literal and obvious interpretation of “the sun rises” or “the sun goes down” is that it literally goes up or down, not that it revolves around the earth and so it only appears to go up, or that the earth rotates on its axis so that it only appears to go down. There is nothing “literal and obvious” about taking the phrase “the sun rises” or “the sun goes down” to mean that the sun revolves or that the earth rotates. The words by themselves do not convey either meaning.

R. Sungenis: “dismantled the geocentric appeal to Pope Leo XIII’s dictum”? Hardly. Mr. Palm forgot to complete Pope Leo XIII’s sentence. It is Mr. Palm who has dismantled his appeal to Pope Leo. The pope said: “not to depart from the literal and obvious sense, except only where reason makes it untenable or necessity requires.” Obviously, if there are only two possible cosmological models to consider (*i.e.*, heliocentrism and geocentrism) and we know that scientifically speaking neither of them can have a “rising sun,” then that knowledge leads us to the conclusion that interpreting the phrase “rising sun” literally is untenable, in either cosmological system.

David Palm: So, both “geocentrists” and “heliocentrists” interpret these words in light of what they believe to be the physical motions of various heavenly bodies. And even the geocentrist admits that the words themselves do not convey the details of the underlying physical reality. From the words themselves, one cannot determine which is correct - the sun revolves around the earth or the earth revolves around the sun. That information simply is not there.

A typical geocentrist response might be that some of the passages cited in support of geocentrism contain phenomenological language, but not all of them do.

R. Sungenis: No, it is not merely a “typical response,” it is the very response I write in *Galileo Was Wrong*. (But you wouldn’t know I was the author of that book since Mr. Palm somehow developed an acute aversion of mentioning my name). In fact, I state in GWW that since other passages that speak of the sun moving and the earth remaining fixed do not use phenomenological language (e.g., “rising sun”) then these passages are the foundation upon which we can know whether “rising sun” refers to a heliocentric or geocentric model, and the Church has used the same passages as well.

David Palm: However, an examination of the passages cited reveals that, in fact, they do all employ phenomenological language.

R. Sungenis: Let me make two preliminary remarks. First, the Catholic Church has no official interpretation of Joshua 10:12-14 (or any other cosmological passage) that says it is to be interpreted phenomenologically. Interpreting them phenomenologically is merely Mr. Palm’s personal opinion. Second, the Catholic Church does, indeed, have official interpretations, backed by the popes of the Ordinary Magisterium, declaring that many cosmological passages are not to be taken as phenomenological. Those decisions come from the magisteriums in 1616 and 1633, in which heliocentrism was condemned as a “formal heresy.” In fact, it was Joshua 10:12-14 that Robert Cardinal Bellarmine used against Galileo, and which was confirmed by the then reigning pope, Paul V. Moreover, there has been no official retraction of those official interpretations. The magisterium is on my side, not Mr. Palm’s.

David Palm: In Josh 10:12-14 we see the very language of the sun going “down” admitted above to be phenomenological; the sun did not literally go down, it appeared to go down.

R. Sungenis: The passage does not say the sun went “down.” The word “down” is added by the English translator of Mr. Palm’s bible. The Hebrew of Josh 10:13 says: “and did not hasten to go for a whole day” wherein the Hebrew text is **וְלֹא־אָץ לְבוֹא כִּיּוֹם תְּמִיּוֹם**, and the word in question is **לְבוֹא** but it does not mean “to go down” but merely “to go.” It is a combination of the Hebrew prefix **לְ** (“to”) and the root word **בוֹא** (“go,” “come,” “bring”). As such, the passage is entirely literal, since the phrase in question is not speaking of the direction of the sun but of the movement of the sun. Consequently, Mr. Palm’s thesis fails.

David Palm: Passages like 2 Kings 20:11 and Isa 38:8 describe the movement of the sun’s shadow on a sundial, not the movement of the sun itself.

R. Sungenis: These passages would only be useful for Mr. Palm if: (1) he had not blundered on the exegesis of Joshua 10:13; and (2) if these were the only passages in Scripture that spoke about whether the sun moves around the Earth or not, but they are not.

David Palm: And another prominent passage claimed for geocentrism, Psa 19:5-6, speaks of the sun coming forth from its “tent” and its “rising” - again, admitted above to be phenomenological language.

R. Sungenis: First, I had already explained in my previous rebuttal to Mr. Palm (posted at www.galileowaswrong.com) that Scripture often uses a mixture of phenomenological (“tent”) and literal language (“orbit”), which is the case with Psalm 19:1-6. Second, and more pertinent to our discussion, Psalm 19:6 does not use the word “rising.” Again, “rising” is a word Mr. Palm’s English translation has used. The literal Hebrew reads: “From one end of the heavens is his going forth” from the Hebrew **מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצֵאוֹ**, in which the word **מוֹצֵאוֹ** is “his going forth” not “his rising.” Again, the passage is speaking about movement from one side of the heaven to the other, not a vertical rising. This meaning is confirmed by the second half of Ps 19:6 “and his orbit to their ends.” The word “orbit” is the Hebrew **וַיִּקְוֹכְתּוּ**, which is from the root **תְּקוּכָה** (“coming around,” “circuit,” “orbit”). Thus there is nothing phenomenological about this passage. It speaks precisely the same way as Joshua 10:13.

David Palm: Both the geocentrist and non-geocentrist agree that these passages are not to be taken literally, but represent the language of appearances, the phenomena that were visible to the observers. But once the geocentrist admits this, he can no longer appeal to these passages as if they literally describe the underlying physical phenomena. And once they no longer literally describe physical phenomena, then no case can be made from them concerning “the essential nature of the things of the visible universe” nor can any claim be made to Leo XIII’s dictum concerning the literal sense of Scripture.

R. Sungenis: As we have seen, it is Mr. Palm who both misconstrues the exegesis of the passage based on fallacious insertions into the text; and Mr. Palm who ignores the fact that the Catholic magisterium used these very passages when confronting the heliocentrists of its day; and Mr.

Palm who failed to apply the last part of Pope Leo XIII's sentence on interpretation. Mr. Palm's omissions could not have been more devastating to his argument.

David Palm: But the neo-geocentrist has a ready reply. What, then, of the teaching of Trent, Vatican I, and Leo XIII that we must never interpret Scripture contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers?

At least one neo-geocentrist has fixated exclusively on the words of a selected sentence of the First Vatican Council and claimed that, on that basis, *any* view expressed by the Fathers, even if they do not cite Scripture, even if they make no indication that it is a matter of faith and morals, falls within the sphere of the "unanimous consent" to which we are bound (see [here](#)). It is bad enough that this ignores the previously section of Vatican I that specifically mentions "faith and morals". But it also ignores the clarification that Pope Leo XIII made when discussing both Trent and Vatican I:

His teaching, and that of other Holy Fathers, is taken up by the Council of the Vatican, which, in renewing the decree of Trent declares its "mind" to be this - that "in things of faith and morals, belonging to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be considered the true sense of Holy Scripture which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose place it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense or also against the unanimous agreement of the Fathers." (Providentissimus Deus 14; my emphasis).

It is only in matters of faith and morals that the unanimity of the Fathers binds. This is the teaching of Trent, Vatican I, and Leo XIII.

R. Sungenis: First, I find it quite odd that Mr. Palm does not cite the decrees against Galileo and heliocentrism from 1616 and 1633 but tries (in vain) to keep his argument tied to Leo XIII. As such, Mr. Palm is doing exactly what I warned about in my opening remarks – he is pitting one Catholic magisterium against another; pitting tradition against the Church, and is siding with the one he thinks proves his argument (though it doesn't, in reality, as we shall see). It is almost as if the 17th century magisterium that condemned heliocentrism didn't exist, for Mr. Palm apparently treats them that way. So in his mind there is no conflict between magisteriums to resolve.

But, if one takes Mr. Palm's view, there certainly is a conflict to resolve. It's usually done by assuming that popular science is correct in saying the Earth revolves around the sun; and therefore Popes Pius V, Paul V, Urban VIII, Alexander VII and Benedict XIV were not decreeing against heliocentrism by an "infallible" decree. This, of course, is a bogus argument since there wasn't any "infallible" decree available for those popes to make, having only been formally established in 1870. If Mr. Palm wants to argue that papal infallibility was retroactive before 1870 he can do so, but then he must make Lumen Gentium 12 retroactive, which says that if the Tradition has held to a belief (which is certainly the case for geocentrism since it was

believed and defended for almost two millennia) then it becomes “infallible” in its own right and cannot be changed by anyone:

The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name (cf. Heb. 13:15). The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (sensus fidei) of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (magisterium), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Th 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3). The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life (Lumen Gentium 12).

Lumen Gentium 12 certainly applies in this case, even if papal infallibility does not. Of course, the infallibility of the pope would only matter in the 1616 and 1633 decrees if science had proven that geocentrism was false, but it never did and never has. In fact, science has found just the opposite. For example, one scientific historian writing about the 1887 Michelson-Morley experiment says this:

“It is both amusing and instructive to speculate on what might have happened if such an experiment could have been performed in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries when men were debating the rival merits of the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems. The result would surely have been interpreted as conclusive evidence for the immobility of the Earth, and therefore as a triumphant vindication of the Ptolemaic system and irrefutable falsification of the Copernican hypothesis” (G. J. Whitrow, *The Structure and Evolution of the Universe*, 1949, 1959, p. 79).

Second, if Mr. Palm would care to look into the 17th century magisteriums, he would find that they concluded that geocentrism **IS** a matter of faith and morals, and this was precisely why they could call heliocentrism a “formal heresy.” It is the same reason they could say that Galileo was “vehemently suspect” of carrying that very heresy. Neither propositions are condemned as heresy nor people condemned as heretics for anything other than faith and morals. The popes took the advice of St. Robert Bellarmine who, in his *Letter to Foscarini*, argued:

“Second, I say that, as you know, the Council [of Trent] has prohibited interpretation of Scripture contrary to the common agreement of the Holy Fathers. And if Your Reverence will read not only the Holy Fathers but also the modern commentaries on

Genesis, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Joshua, you will find that they all agree on the literal interpretation that the sun is in heaven and rotates around the earth with great speed, and that the earth is very far from the heavens and stands immobile in the center of the world. Ask yourself then how could the Church, in its prudence, support an interpretation of Scripture which is contrary to all the Holy Fathers and to all the Greek and Latin commentators. Nor can one reply that this is not a matter of faith, because even if it is not a matter of faith because of the subject matter [ex parte objecti], it is still a matter of faith because of the speaker [ex parte dicentis]. Thus anyone who would say that Abraham did not have two sons and Jacob twelve would be just as much of a heretic as someone who would say that Christ was not born of a virgin, for the Holy Spirit has said both of these things through the mouths of the Prophets and the Apostles.." (Le Opere di Galileo Galilei, vol. 12, p. 172).

Of course, the implication of Mr. Palm's view is that he believes he knows better than the 17th century magisterium on how to classify geocentrism.

Furthermore, Mr. Palm argues above that "It is only in matters of faith and morals that the unanimity of the Fathers binds. This is the teaching of Trent, Vatican I, and Leo XIII." Granted. But where does Trent, Vatican I or Leo XII ever say that geocentrism is not a matter of faith and morals? Nowhere. What Mr. Palm did was assume geocentrism wasn't a matter of faith and morals (and did so without any support or discussion of his assertion whatsoever) and then imposed that assumption onto Trent, Vatican I and Leo XIII. Like everyone else who has an agenda to support heliocentrism, Mr. Palm reads into Leo XIII what he wants to see; and he doesn't show the slightest shame for trying to make Leo XIII trump Pius V, Paul V and Urban VIII.

David Palm: Now, keeping these two points in mind, we progress to *Providentissimus Deus* 18 where Pope Leo XIII explicitly states that in areas where the writers of sacred Scripture utilize "more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even by the most eminent men of science. Ordinary speech primarily and properly describes what comes under the senses", the Holy Spirit "did not intend to teach men these things (that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things in no way profitable unto salvation"

Therefore, both the appeal to Pope Leo XIII's reference literal sense of the text and the appeal to a supposed unanimous sense of the Fathers fails to establish any obligation on a Catholic to interpret various passage of Scripture in support of geocentrism.

R. Sungenis: Once again, Mr. Palm bases his conclusion on false premises. We've already shown that "sacred Scripture" did not "utilize 'more or less figurative language,'" in the case of Joshua 10:13 and Psalm 19:6 (the two passage Mr. Palm used as proof for figurative language,

but obviously failed). We've already shown that Catholic Tradition and the Catholic magisterium used those very passages to prove geocentrism against heliocentrism and that *Lumen Gentium* 12 upholds that belief as "without error." And we've already shown that Mr. Palm merely reads into Leo XIII what he wants to see, since Leo neither says geocentrism is not a matter of faith and morals nor that the Church Fathers did not believe geocentrism was a matter of faith and morals. So when we come to Mr. Palm's third argument regarding *Providentissimus 18*, it falls flat on his face since it is based on three false premises. Try as he will, Mr. Palm will look in vain to find anything in *Prov. 18* that refers to the geocentrism v. heliocentrism debate.

Mr. Palm: I have already touched upon the events of the seventeenth century in connection with the Galileo case and have explained why I do not believe that even those official ecclesiastical actions constitute a binding of Church to geocentrism as a matter of faith. I hope to return to address some details of those actions in future postings.

R. Sungenis: And I refuted Mr. Palm's fallacious reasoning and conclusions here:

<http://galileowaswrong.com/galileowaswrong/features/6.pdf>

Mr. Palm: But to summarize here: Since 1) it is in matters of faith and morals that the Church exercises her authentic magisterium and 2) it is only on matters of faith and morals that the unanimity of the Fathers may be invoked as binding and 3) Pope Leo XIII and Pius XII made absolutely clear that the Holy Spirit "did not intend to teach men these things (that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things in no way profitable unto salvation"...

R. Sungenis: Again, Mr. Palm reads into Leo's encyclical what he wants to see, since Leo mentioned nothing about "geocentrism" or about cosmology or about the sun and earth. The most Leo did was make a reference to "the the essential nature of the things of the visible universe" but that can refer to anything. For example, Scripture doesn't get into the "essential nature" of the atom or the "essential nature" of stars, since Scripture does not deal with the visible universe on the micro level of observation. On the contrary, Scripture does deal with the visible universe on the macro level. In fact, as we saw with Psalm 19:1-6 (the very passage Mr. Palm tried to dismiss as phenomenological by inserting the word "rising") that Scripture itself says in Romans 10:17-18 that such passages actually preach the Gospel, and it is that very passage that says the sun "orbits" the Earth. St. Paul teaches again in Romans 1:18-20 that man can even know that God exists and has divine power by looking at the creation. Likewise, it was because Joshua stopped the sun from moving that it is regarded as a demonstration of the divine power of God and is repeated as such in Habakuk 3:11 about a thousand years later when God is about to destroy Babylon. Additionally, it is the very immobility of the Earth that is used as an example of God's immutability in Psalm 96:10. On and on Scripture uses macro cosmology to not only preach the Gospel but the God behind it.

Second, in the same paragraph of Pope Leo's statements in Prov. Deus 18, he mentions St. Thomas' teaching and writes:

“Ordinary speech primarily and properly describes what comes under the senses; and somewhat in the same way the sacred writers-as the Angelic Doctor also reminds us – ‘went by what sensibly appeared,’ or put down what God, speaking to men, signified, in the way men could understand and were accustomed to.

But the bare fact is, St. Thomas (the Angelic Doctor) was a geocentrist as were all the medievals. So how could Thomas be used as an example of someone who interpreted Scripture's geocentric passages as examples of the “way the sacred writers went by what sensibly appeared” (geocentrism) yet mean the opposite (heliocentrism)? In fact, where Thomas disputed with the other Fathers on cosmogony by accepting St. Augustine's idea that creation was made instantaneously instead of over six-days, he had no such reservations about geocentrism and neither did any other medievals or Church Father. (The only medieval that did was Nicholas of Cusa but his ideas were condemned by the Church). In light of Augustine's view of creation, we might say that Leo XIII made room for him by implying that the six days of creation were a “way the sacred writers went by what sensibly appeared,” but there is nothing from Leo regarding geocentrism.

David Palm: ...therefore it cannot be said that the Church ever taught geocentrism as a matter of faith in her ordinary magisterium.

R. Sungenis: And we saw above that Mr. Palm is incorrect, since the very reason both Paul V and Urban VIII declared heliocentrism a “formal heresy” and condemned Galileo as “suspect of heresy” is because they held that distorting Scripture (as heliocentrism did) was a matter of faith and morals, and their teaching on this issue followed the Tradition laid down from the Fathers onward.

David Palm: And it is admitted even by the neo-geocentrists that she has never done so in her extraordinary magisterium.

R. Sungenis: Even though we concede that point, it is not as good as it looks for Mr. Palm. First, we've already seen that Lumen Gentium 12 says that is the Traditional belief persists it persists “without error.” I don't know of any doctrine other than geocentrism that was held by so many people, for so long a time and without any contention, at least until Foscarini and Galileo came along in the 1600s. As such, unless Mr. Palm can show that the Traditional Church (Church Fathers, medievals, doctors, popes, saints, etc) did not believe in geocentrism or had contentions about it, then Lumen Gentium 12 holds for geocentrism and all contenders are in error.

Second, we must also consider the fact that neither Paul V or Urban VIII knew about any “extraordinary” magisterium in the sense of papal infallibility. They decreed what they decreed and the Church followed. Urban VIII, for example, had extensive conversations with the Grand Duke of Tuscany and stated that heliocentrism would “destroy” the Church. After he condemned heliocentrism as a formal heresy he sent letters all over Europe demanding that the papal nuncios and universities comply with Rome’s decision on the matter. He certainly didn’t consider his decree fallible or reformable. The only pope who had made any motions the other way was Gregory XVI when he took Galileo off the Index, but he did so because he was under duress, that is, he was given false information by his commissioner, Maurizio Olivieri, and therefore he was not responsible for his act.

Third, we must consider the fact that doctrine such as the canon of Scripture, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption were not officially authorized by the “extraordinary magisterium” until very late in history (e.g., the canon in 1543; the Immaculate Conception in 1854; the Assumption in 1950) but this did not mean the doctrines were any less true or that the Tradition prior could be faulted for making an error, but this is how Mr. Palm wants to classify geocentrism before it ever has a chance of gaining “extraordinary” status among the Church’s doctrines. Mr. Palm would rather pick apart the Ordinary magisterium and accuse her of not only falsely condemning Galileo, but of even thinking that geocentrism was a matter of faith and morals. And all based on what? On some cryptic sentences in Leo XIII’s encyclical that Mr. Palm has to read into in order to find support for his views.

David Palm: Geocentrism is not now, nor has it ever been, a part of the Church’s ordinary magisterium (on this, see also Jeffrey Mirus, [Galileo and the Magisterium: a Second Look](#))

R. Sungenis: Dr. Mirus’ essay will also be critiqued and appear on the www.galileowaswrong.com website.